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## HOME-STUDY REFORM

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In matters scholastic the sole guide and inspiration has been tradition. Like the Chinese wall which barred from entry the civilizing influences of modern times, the tradition of conventional methods in education has generally frowned upon new thought and plans not based upon precedents. It is our purpose to break an opening in this Chinese wall of educational traditions by forcing through it humane, common-sense innovations on a vital matter—home study.

Has it ever occurred to the teacher that he deals with living material souls? If so, then let them be treated as something more than material which must perhaps, figuratively speaking, be molded and handled to suit the artificial conditions of traditional origin and present convenience. It is, as a matter of course, easier to move along beaten paths than to make new roads which in the end may prove more advantageous. Unfortunately many of us are not ready for new doctrines when we find that they mean more work for the teacher. If the creed, the schools are for the boys and girls and not for the teachers, except in so far as the teachers are there for the pupils, be accepted, you will have at least one basis for the statements and experience herewith presented.

What a school is, does not require definition. The teacher is the important factor of the school. The modern teacher has too often, per force of tradition and method, become a mere automatic recitation-receiving device and a machine lesson-assigning apparatus. This implies that lessons are assigned to school attendants. Less than 50 per cent of the pupils, as teachers well know, do the unreasonable amount of home study required of them; the other 50 per cent "kill time" at school. Just bear this in mind, however. The municipality, the state, and the United States have established eight hours as the legal day for manual workers. I do not think it right or even humane that we educators should work young

boys and girls five hours in school and then set tasks that take many, many hours at home. If the common eight-hour law applies to the adult man for manual labor, I cannot comprehend why it should not be enforced in favor of the growing school child who has not reached his maturity, since mental labor is more trying and enervating.

Under present conditions of lesson-assignment, the conscientious children come from play to the evening meal, hurriedly swallow that, and then work at books until bedtime. In this way not only do they menace their health, but they lose the association with parents and the necessary appreciation of family relations and interests. To this is, in my judgment, partly to be attributed the children's rampant disrespect for parents and elders, who cannot understand or know their offspring because of lack of association. Further, I believe that the present undercurrent of immorality in the lives of boys and girls is, in part, due to this loss of parental association and the lack of the moral influence of the family. Home study is a frequent excuse for children to remain away from church on Sunday and from church functions which occur during the week. Evenings, too, the child is of necessity debarred from attendance at lectures, at concerts, or at the theater. Thus it is evident that the present methods, to a certain extent, are unhygienic, and bar the child from such moral, cultural, and religious influences as would do much to educate him in the highest sense.

The school should be the educational workshop, the place where, if possible, all the work of the school should be done. Many children do not have proper home environment for study, while some are forced to assume household duties, and others to go to work. It would be well if the child, when night comes, could throw off, as does the laborer and business man, his burdens and cares. This plan of ours is founded upon common-sense sentiment which has in mind the welfare of the boys and girls. By employing a rational method for minimizing home study or carrying on the same on a sane basis, we, in the Central Commercial and Manual Training High School of Newark, are trying to practically emancipate pupils from home study.

The school program has five main hour periods in a day, with

five-minute intermissions for recreation and relaxation. School begins at half-past eight. A ten-minute spelling period is followed by daily morning exercises lasting till the beginning of the first hour period, about nine o'clock. Three periods complete the morning session, which ends at a quarter past twelve. A half-hour noon period is allowed. Then two hour periods till three o'clock complete the required school session. From three to four o'clock, however, the subject-teachers are at their various stations, to confer with the pupils who may desire instruction or wish to study after school. This saves the students from what has frequently happened to you and to me. After spending many a weary, conscientious hour at study we would find points here and there in our lessons which we were unable to understand, and would decide to ask teacher the next day to mend for us the conception of a lesson punctured with doubts. But youthlike we forgot, or else too many others were with teacher when we came, and teacher was not questioned. The lesson began, and, wonder of wonders, we were always asked for that which we did not know, and therefore unjustly credited with failure, though we had put much time on our task. By the new plan the pupil obtains the complete mind picture of the lesson through directed study, instead of an impression of unsatisfactorily acquired knowledge.

Our periods last sixty honest minutes, and thus differ from the current forty-five-minute periods, which in the average, after all allowances have been made for the passage of classes, represent about thirty-five minutes of recitation or work. The sixty minutes are divided into approximately equal parts, or as the teacher thinks best. The first portion of a period is spent in recitation. The second portion is employed in conference or independent study with the teacher, the children being in the atmosphere of the subject. It gives the instructor a chance to know that each child is studying his special subject, as well as to observe and direct the methods of study. The teacher who knows the subject, working with the children, can give them some of the trade secrets for handling the same. He shows the pupils how to study and how to form correct study-habits. This well-directed functioning power leads the pupil to confidence in self and to personal initiative.

Thus the instructor is certain that honest effort has been expended, while individual, independent work has been done by the pupil.

Concentration and intensive effort in study, influenced by the aura of the inspired teacher, is the outcome of the system. Concentration is a valuable trait to the child as to the adult. Despite the distractions of the classroom, the child becomes so strong-minded that he continues to devote himself to his work. Such power of self spells control at a critical moment. He is not the man of the hour who, when a crisis occurs, says "Keep quiet, or let me retire to my study to think this out." We are by this method cultivating the men and women of the future, who in the midst of distracting conditions will be able to think and act sanely, promptly, and properly, because of this acquired power to concentrate the thoughts when direct need requires.

The large study-room of the present is a place for the congregation of all who either have nothing to do or who have lessons to study. This room, policed by the best disciplinarian, becomes a place where an atmosphere of miscellaneous studies and pastimes has miscellaneous psychological effects upon the students. Such an atmosphere is not suited to serious effort. Hence the "general" study-hall should, in my judgment, be abolished, as a wasteful part of the school scheme, in so far as the children's benefits are concerned.

Similarly, in educational practice, the traditional recitation and study plan discourages the vast majority who are eager for the benefits of education, in that it does not give value proportionate to the effort expended. Children are quick to recognize this, and therefore leave school. The old system of apprenticeship fell into disuse, not only on account of the opposition of labor, but also because in most cases it did not accomplish all that was expected. It was wasteful inasmuch as the individual was for long periods kept at tasks that bore only incidental relation to the special vocational purpose. With the traditional plan of school administration, the recitation too frequently becomes for the pupil a mere exposure to a fusillade of questions, the intent of which generally is not to find out how much the pupil knows, but what he does not know. If the youngster knows an entire lesson

except one or two points, he is considered ignorant not only of those points, but of the entire lesson.

By the old plan of home study, we develop several classes of students: (1) those who may try to dig out things for themselves; (2) those who get injudicious aid from elders; (3) those who co-operate with one or more pupils in getting the lesson; (4) those who rely on fellow-students for their work; (5) those who do no work at all.

By the new plan the teacher is not at the pupil's elbow, to give indiscriminate assistance. Because of the long period, the teacher exercises the complete functions of the true teacher, whose purpose it is to cultivate in the pupil the power to do and to think independently, and thus to teach the most advantageous use of self. The new system encourages each pupil to work by himself and for himself. It gives him that honest, judicious direction of effort or energy that we find nature so fittingly analogously gives for the conservation of energy in every division of the universe. We in our school note that practically all the pupils work, and that independently. We have under the new system more evenly balanced recitations and greater interest than is obtained by the old method. After three months' trial of this system, discipline has become an almost unnoticeable factor in the administration of the school.

A psychological phenomenon, is our noon period. The teachers have been instructed to leave the school to itself. Many teachers leave the building for their luncheons. Pupils do not leave the building except on permit, but eat either in the lunch-rooms or on the roof playground. With a registration of 1,160, with a daily average attendance of 1,030, with no teachers in charge, with no monitor system, with no evident form of student-government, the Central High School manages and conducts itself properly throughout the lunch period. This remarkable condition is, in my judgment, due to our plan of school program. It is a fact that when the adult has performed his day's work satisfactorily he does not seek evil channels as a means for getting rid of surplus energy. The child, because it feels contentment and satisfaction that arises from work well done and from repaid effort, does not ruse its surplus power for mischievous purposes. It does tigh

for right's sake. From this springs that wonderful self-control which in the youthful body of over 1,100 students means a nucleus for good citizenship which every community must consider a most valuable asset.

There is an evident lack of fatigue, though the school hours are long, from half-past eight to three, with the extra period from three to four. There is no diminution of interest or weariness noticeable before the noon period or before the afternoon close of school. There is a patent alertness and brightness of the eye that indicates the good attention and scholarship which is present.

This system has not discouraged any of the usual school activities, as we have our athletic association, our monthly school paper, our orchestra, mandolin club, dramatic and other organizations. Administrative difficulties dwindle in number through our method, since self-control and kindred virtues spontaneously appear. Because of our method, we know that each pupil works to the best advantage.

By the plan given, home study is minimized, and in the case of the brightest pupils even eliminated. The plan permits the child after school hours to delve deeply into the treasures of literature while doing the laboratory work of English at the school. It offers time for other forms of research. It makes possible church-attendance and consequent religious and moral training. It gives an opportunity for the aesthetic influence of music, the theater, and the lecture-hall. The dread that the American boy will find his way to the street and to vice if left without home study is groundless. For this system has everything to offer in the way of inspiration to culture, refinement, and the ambitious desire for advancement and progress.

Home study should never be made a lever for influencing morals. Has the parent no duty in this connection? If the parent is powerless, let the social-service organizations aid to better and strengthen moral influence and permit the school, while co-operating, to broaden the pupil intellectually and to give greater power to do and to be. By our plan we give the boy and girl a chance to develop manhood and womanhood. The school thus proves itself a friend, not a task-master, and becomes a humane, wise "assistant parent."